

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 240745Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4544

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USINT BAGHDAD

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 0363

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, KU

SUBJ: RUMORS OF CABINET CHANGES - KUWAIT

1. OVER PAST SEVERAL YEARS EMBASSY HAS REPORTED RECURRENT RUMORS OF POSSIBLE MAJOR CHANGES IN KUWAITI CABINET. LAST PROLONGED SEIGE WAS DURING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING NATIONAL ELECTIONS HELD IN JANUARY 1975 AT WHICH TIME SPECULATION WAS RAMPANT THAT THE DEFENSE AND INTERIOR PORTFOLIOS WOULD BE SPLIT AND THAT THE RULING FAMILY'S PRODIGAL SON, SHAIKH JABIR AL-ALI, WOULD BE NAMED MINISTER OF DEFENSE. NEITHER EVENT OCCURRED AND SHAIKH JABIR SUBSEQUENTLY WAS GIVEN THE N WLY CREATED POHT OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, TOGETHER WITH THE INFORMATION MINISTRY PORTFOLIO.

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2. THE PROLONGED CURRENT ABSENCE FROM KUWAIT OF DEFENSE AND

INTERIOR MINISTER SHAIKH SA'AD ABDALLAH IN LONDON (HE HAS BEEN THERE SINCE EARLY NOVEMBER) HAS AGAIN LED TO WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO RELIEVE HIM OF HIS DEFENSE PORTFOLIO. SOME ALLEGE THIS WILL BE PART OF WIDER CABINET CHANGES MASTERMINDED BY PRIME MINISTER JABIR AL-AHMAD.

3. CURRENT AND PAST RUMORS HAVE CENTERED AROUND DESIRE PRESENT AMIR (WHO IS NOT WELL, BUT MORE TIRED THAN SICK) TO ABDICATE IN FAVOR OF SHAIKH JABIR AL-AHMAD, THE CROWN PRINCE/PRIME MINISTER. THE FAMILY'S PROBLEM IS WHAT TO DO WITH SHAIKH JABIR AL-ALI, WHO IN NATURAL PROGRESSION WOULD STEP IN AS CROWN PRINCE/PRIME MINISTER. MANY, INCLUDING EMBASSY, BELIEVE HE IS INCAPABLE OF DEMANDS OF THE POSITION AND THAT HE COULD BRING CONSIDERABLE EMBARRASSMENT TO THE FAMILY AND KUWAIT INTERNATIONALLY. HE IS NOT LIKELY TO STEP ASIDE GRACEFULLY, HOWEVER. JUST WHAT COULD BE THROWN HIS WAY TO GET HIM TO BOW OUT IS UNCLEAR.

4. TWO NEW LINE-UPS ARE BEING BRUITED. ONE WOULD BRING IN AS CROWN PRINCE/PRIME MINISTER SHAIKH SALIM AL-SABAH, THE ONLY OTHER REALLY ELIGIBLE AND ABLE MEMBER OF THE AL-SALIM BRANCH OF THE FAMILY (FORMERLY AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON AND CURRENTLY MINISTER OF UGICAL AFFAIRS AND LABOR). THIS WOULD BE DICEY, HOWEVER, SINCE HE NOT ONLY WOULD HAVE TO STEP OVER JABIR AL-ALI, BUT ALSO SHAIKH SA'AD ABDALLAH (THE OTHER RANKING AL-SALIM). ALTHOUGH OPINIONS VARY, IT GENERALLY IS BELIEVED THAT SHAIKH SA'AD IS OUT OF THE RUNNING BECAUSE OF HIS HERITAGE (MOTHER WAS A SLAVE). THE OTHER POSSIBILITY ALLEGEDLY BEING CONSIDERED IS TO BRING IN THE CURRENT FOREIGN MINISTER, SHAIKH SABAH AL-AHMAD, AS PRIME MINISTER/CROWN PRINCE. ALTHOUGH THIS WOULD RUN COUNTER TO TRADITION SINCE SABAH (LIKE THE CURRENT PRIME MINISTER/CROWN PRINCE) IS AN AL-JABIR, THERE IS A HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR HAVING SUCCESSIVE AMIRS FROM THE SAME BRANCH OF THE FAMILY.

5. ABOVE DISTILLATION RUMORS IS PASSED TO DEPARTMENT IN THE EVENT THEY ACTUALLY PRESAGE IMPORTANT CHANGES. WE HAVE NO CONCRETE GROUNDS TO ASSUME ANY MAJOR CHANGES ARE IMINENT, BUT ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IN GROWING COMPETITIVE SITUATION IN RULING FAMILY. MEANWHILE, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT DURING RECENT VISIT TO KUWAIT DEPCINCEUR GENERAL ROBERT HUYSER, ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER JABIR AL-ALI ADDRESSED QUESTION OF FUTURE US/KUWAITI MILITARY RELATION-
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SHIP WITH CONSIDERABLE AUTHORITY, WITHOUT REFERENCE TO ABSENT DEFENSE MINISTER SHAIKH SA'AD ABDALLAH, AND INSISTED ON PROMINENT PRESS COVERAGE HIS ROLE IN DISCUSSIONS THIS SUBJECT.
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